DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 336 TM 026 819

AUTHOR Lafleur, Clay; Tucker, John
TITLE Understanding Teachers' Perspectives on Curriculum and Assessment Reform or the More Things Change: Change-Oriented, Experienced Teachers' Views and Practices Regarding Mandated Change.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Collegiality; Cooperation; *Curriculum Development; Educational Assessment; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; High School Students; *Instructional Leadership; Interdisciplinary Approach; Junior High School Students; Professional Development; State Legislation; Stress Variables; *Teacher Attitudes; Time Management
IDENTIFIERS *Ontario

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to see how six teachers, who had experience with educational change, dealt with particular curriculum mandated reforms in the province of Ontario (Canada). Teachers were asked to reflect and comment on their experiences implementing "The Common Curriculum, Policies and Outcomes, Grades 1 to 9, 1995," an initiative of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training that focused on measurable and demonstrable learning outcomes for all students. The policy favored grouping traditional disciplines into the four program areas of the arts, language, mathematics, science and technology, and personal and social studies. The six teachers of grades 7, 8, or 9 from were selected because of their successful approaches to the reform. Teachers identified obstacles to reform, beginning with the physical separation of grade 9 from grades 7 and 8, something that makes collaboration difficult. Other issues that made reform difficult were content coverage issues, attitudes of staff colleagues, uncertainty and stress, and time factors. Things that facilitated change were a favorable attitude toward integration of learning, leadership and support, team teaching, teacher control of change, and teacher attitude to change. (Contains three tables and seven references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Clay Lafleur
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED 409 336

UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REFORM

or

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE: CHANGE-ORIENTED, EXPERIENCED TEACHERS' VIEWS AND PRACTICES REGARDING MANDATED CHANGE

by

Clay Lafleur

John Tucker

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto

TM026819

Paper presented at

The American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting

Chicago, March 24 -28, 1997

Introduction

Controversies, tensions and uncertainties characterize current education workplace practice. There are increasing expectations to do more with less. Within such an uncertain context there are particular teachers who stand out, seeming to be part of the change and not simply implementers of the change. They are involved in visible, sustained efforts. They seem to be committed to change, demonstrating a proficiency and expertise in dealing with daily experiences related to change. This study posits that these teachers hold a kind of personal practical knowledge and have certain perspectives and basic assumptions that enable them to be optimistic while many of their colleagues seem overwhelmed. As the clamour for school reforms continues, there is increasing recognition that different forms of school organization and leadership are required. There are too many kinds of expertise needed for a traditional administrative team to closely manage all the changes. Hence we must consider forms of distributed leadership by teachers actively involved with educational change.

The Research Intent

This study was designed to see how six teachers, who had experience with educational change, were dealing with particular curriculum mandated reform in the province of Ontario. How were these teachers operating? What practices did they find successful? What beliefs underpinned their practices? What where the phenomena which contributed to their success? What did success mean to them? The participants in the study were asked to consider particular initiatives which they had in some way helped initiate, monitor, publicly respond to, or pilot.

The teachers were asked to reflect and comment on their experiences with implementing **The Common Curriculum, Policies and Outcomes, Grades 1 to 9, 1995**, an Ontario Ministry of Education and Training policy initiative which focused on measurable, demonstrable, learning outcomes for all students. This ministry policy de-emphasized subjects in favour of grouping traditional disciplines into four quadrants or program areas. These program areas are: The Arts; Language; Mathematics, Science, and Technology; and Personal and Social Studies: Self and Society. In contrast to the focus on accountability and standards through the use of learning outcomes, the Common Curriculum also promotes a constructivist approach to learning, supports

integration of subjects and program areas, and encourages collaboration among teachers, parents and members of the wider community.

Transition Years, Grades 7, 8 and 9: Policy and Program Requirements, 1992 was an earlier key policy document driving change. Reforms here embody a new emphasis on preparing students for high school by ensuring that all students experience a wide variety of curricula. A major focus was on the organization of classes, including the practice of "destreaming" classes.

> ... the organization of classes in Grades 7,8 and 9 shall not be determined according to perceived student ability, and the program in Grade 9 shall not be organized according to levels of difficulty. Schools shall provide for heterogeneous and flexible groupings of students within classes and shall ensure that all students have an opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes specified in **The Common Curriculum, Grades 1 to 9**.
>
> (Ministry of Education and Training, 1992)

The major implications of these two policy initiatives can be summarized as:

* a focus on accountability and standards
* content as a vehicle - not a product
* learning based on outcomes rather than objectives
* learning as a socially constructed process - the student as active learner
* teacher as a facilitator of learning
* collaboration among teachers, parents and members of the wider community
* integration of subjects and program areas rather than a focus on isolated disciplines
* an emphasis on a variety of assessments to describe student achievement
* reporting progress compared to learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980) was used to select six teachers to participate in this study. The intent was to identify those teachers who were judged to be "successfully" implementing recent curriculum policy as perceived by board office personnel in a large Ontario school board. These teachers were deemed to be leaders of change and leaders of

groups of teachers. Innovators all, they had long-term experience in classrooms, school committees, school board committees, as well as federation and/or provincial ministry committees.

School board office personnel were asked to identify one or two grade 7, 8 or 9 teachers who, in their opinion, were involved in a serious, sustained and committed way in the implementation of curriculum reform. The purpose was to identify teachers who had demonstrated a proficiency and expertise in dealing with daily experiences related to change in these grade levels. Six teachers from those nominated were then approached and invited to participate in a structured interview.

Pseudonyms used for the six teachers are: Norma, Jane, Michael, David, Sally and Cynthia. All were experienced; all were actively involved in change. Norma has 16 years teaching experience, one of them as a lecturer at the Faculty of Education of the University of Toronto. She taught three years in an elementary school and the remaining twelve years at the high school level involved teaching grade 9 students. After returning from a nine year hiatus from teaching, Norma became actively involved in numerous school, board and community committees. She is also the Transition Years coordinator for her school. Jane has 23 years teaching experience, all involving grade 9 students. She is actively involved in provincial initiatives related to music education and has developed an integrated arts curriculum to support the Common Curriculum initiative in her school. Michael has been teaching for 14 years and has been working with intermediate level students for the past 11 years. He has been actively involved in implementing Common Curriculum initiatives related to integration, broad based technology and student assessment. David has 22 years experience and has taught grade 9 in each of those years. He has represented his district in responding to Ministry revisions to the Transitions Years reform. With his background in science he has been heavily involved in integrating science, mathematics and technology on committee at the school level. Sally had just completed her 28th year in education at the time of interview [1995]. She has had experience teaching all grades from 1 to 8 but has concentrated on grades 7 and 8 for 19 years. She has been involved in the provincial Art Subject Council and in that capacity has been actively engaged in Transition Years committee work. She is presently working on a board level committee for the implementation of provisions of the Common Curriculum for the Arts. Cynthia

has 22 years of teaching experience and has been teaching grades 7 and 8 for all but one of them. She has been on board planning committees for both Transition Years and Common Curriculum. She has also worked at the school level on the Transition Years planning committee. Together, these six teachers have much experience and have demonstrated talent in managing to survive and even thrive in an era of constant, mandated change.

Data Collection

Qualitative interviews were a feature of the study (Kvale, 1996). A phenomenological orientation was used to focus on the experiences of the teachers. One interview of about sixty minutes was completed with each teacher, giving each sufficient time to explain how they manage their classroom roles and professional responsibilities in the face of externally mandated curriculum change and reform. Since limited time was available for this study, an interview schedule developed for an Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto transfer grant study (Hargreaves and Earl, 1995) was used as a general guide for the interviews. Even though the interview schedule consisted of 41 questions which comprehensively probed issues surrounding the Transition Years and the Common Curriculum initiatives, the intent was to have each individual's story emerge. These stories would help us determine how they dealt with these specific, large-scale changes. They would also help us understand how these teachers faced mandated change during their long and successful careers. The interviews focused primarily on the day-to-day activities of teachers as they engage in serious, sustained and committed efforts to deal with curriculum reform and change.

Data Analysis

All interviews were tape recorded and transcripts were made. The interview transcripts were analysed for major themes and sub-themes using the procedure of unitizing and categorizing as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The issues that emerged became the 'grounded theory'. It was at this point that there appeared to be sufficient transcript data to identify three major themes: Obstacles to Change, Facilitators of Change, and Beliefs and Practices.

The sub-themes which emerged are grouped under the major themes as follows:

Obstacles to Change

- Physical Obstacles
- Content Coverage
- Attitudes to Staff
- Uncertainty and Stress
- Time

Facilitators of Change

- Subjects vs Quadrants
- Leadership and Support
- Team Teaching
- Input/Control of Change
- Attitude to change

Beliefs and Practices

- Attitude about Students
- Attitude about Parents
- Classroom Strategies
- Outcome vs Objectives
- Evaluation

Limitations

Participants were selected from one school district in Ontario. Although this jurisdiction includes an urban/rural mix and is a large school board (in excess of 50,000 students), the multicultural and socio-economic range of students found in large urban Canadian centres is not represented. As a result, certain kinds of problems may not exist. Similarly, resources which might characterize other situations may not be considered. Furthermore, the selection process precluded any representativeness. Within this context, no attempt was made to select a random sample or apply criteria such as validity or reliability. The selected group may have specific views which are

not shared by colleagues. No attempt was made to determine the sources or causes of these views. They may be entirely due to background and experience, they may come from psychological profiles of these teachers, or they may be some subtle combination of both these sources. Like qualitative research generally, the findings of this research will have to be applied in subsequent cases as researchers and practitioners see fit. Efforts were made to ensure that the foundational criteria of trustworthiness described by Lincoln and Guba, (1985) apply.

Ethical Issues

Given the maturity of the participants and the non-intrusive nature of the inquiry, formal board approval was not deemed essential. Nevertheless, the board's Educational Research Advisory Committee was informed that the study was being undertaken and general approval to proceed was obtained. Also, since the nature of the present study involved working directly with individuals, an effort was made to ensure that they were fully informed of the purposes of the study and that their rights to withdraw at any time and their right to anonymity would be honoured. Concerns such as no harm to participants, no deception, confidentiality, full and frank disclosure, impartiality, risks associated with publication of research findings, and professional research responsibility were discussed with each participant. No consent form was used; participants agreed to participate simply by giving oral approval. Informed consent, and other ethical issues, were addressed through respectful communication and collaboration between the researcher and the participants. Pseudonyms are employed throughout this report to further protect participants from unsolicited subsequent involvement in the research.

FINDINGS

The findings are grouped as sub-themes within themes. The narrative portion of each of the major themes is followed by a table for each. The narrative is meant to be a readable version of what participants tend to agree on, although that is not rigidly so. While the predominant procedure was negative case analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), that procedure was abandoned when an interesting alternative point of view was expressed from time to time. Where exceptions occurred these are noted. The tables are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of the kinds of notions that

teachers expressed in each emerging category. The narrative portion is interpreted and related while the tables contain only selected, edited quotes which represent each participant's position on each issue. The comparison of participants' comments to the narrative will allow the reader to formulate individual evaluations from the data which may be more precise than ours.

Obstacles

The first major theme - obstacles - emerged from teachers' perceptions of hindrances to change with regard to the mandated changes of the Common Curriculum/Transition Years initiatives.

Physical Obstacles

One major thrust of the Common Curriculum/Transition Years is that students are to demonstrate specific levels of achievement at the ends of grade 3, 6, and 9. This means that teachers of grades 7, 8, and 9 are required to work collaboratively to see that these outcomes are addressed. In Ontario schools, students typically go to a new building when beginning grade 9, it being traditionally the first year of high school. This physical separation dramatically interferes with teachers of grades 8 and 9 working closely together; planning and implementing a 30 month curriculum becomes problematic.

At the same time, students of grade 7 and 8, being in an elementary school building, are separated from the more elaborately equipped high schools. They do not have ready access to such resources as computers and science laboratory equipment. Spaces in elementary schools tend to be much less specific in design.

Destreaming - the integration of all students of all abilities in the same classrooms - coupled with the use of portable classrooms, has generally meant that these experienced teachers have been seeing more students in classes every year. They have also been seeing more extremes in student behaviour every year. As David states:

> . . . of 30 kids at any given time at least 5 of them are going to be off task doing something else that requires your attention.

Content Coverage

All participants felt uneasy about this issue. All presumed that there was a traditional requirement that students have a certain grasp of a specific content in order to be ready for high school. Letting go of previous practice and beliefs was hard to do. Michael thinks it is a ". . . nightmare to cover all those bases." Sally feels sorry for new teachers who are not already familiar with all that content. She points to a groaning bookshelf:

> . . . look at the binders I have. That's the 7/8 curriculum. How are you going to do that in one year?. . . I've added up all the minutes that you are supposed to teach and it was like 2 1/2 or 3 years worth in one year.

These concerns are not vague impressions. There are approximately 16 separate policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education and Training that indicate what curriculum must be covered. These requirements are in addition to other curriculum resources such as texts, and school or school district documents.

Attitudes to Staff

All participants saw themselves as being willing to change and interested in change. They viewed colleagues on staff as being much less interested in change than they themselves were. Participants spoke of many colleagues who were 'angry', 'frustrated,' and 'shaking their heads' - inclined to resist or even planning to resist the ministry mandates. Retraining was viewed as essential or as Cynthia puts it, ". . .the tide is going to come rushing in on us". Participants had grown accustomed to staff resistance to any kinds of change. Norma and Sally regarded themselves as being in different camps from these colleagues. Norma wanted to learn patience in dealing with change-resistant colleagues while Sally's colleagues have stopped debating with her, "They know how I feel, so they don't say too much around me".

Uncertainty and Stress

All participants admitted to being uncertain about the ministry's intentions for curricular demands, uncertain about how effectively new policies are to be implemented, and uncertain about the general direction of education. They sensed that education has become a much more volatile realm politically than it was in previous decades. Because of this, they suspected that ministry documents which quickly supersede each other will continue to be produced as government's response to the pressures of various interest groups. Mark complained that:

> There's just too many things that we've been expected to do for a long time now. Different people have dealt with it in different ways, but there's always been a negative aspect to it.

Sally had ". . .never had so much stress", since she began teaching almost thirty years before. All participants were concerned about the future. All, though optimistic, felt challenged by the diversity and complexity of educational issues and influences facing them.

Time

Without prompting, Michael identified time as a major concern and obstacle:

> I see time as the big concern to implementing the common curriculum, whether it's timetabling or planning or organization. Time seems to be the big issue for teacher inservice. It's the theme that runs through everything when you are trying to do integration.

Deciding how much time should be devoted to teaching certain topics was a constant worry for participants. The time allotment decision was made more complex by the fact that students completed similar projects year after year. Was this repetition time well spent as reinforcement or time wasted by needless repetition? How to use time productively was considered a daily challenge.

Michael continued:

> . . . we are struggling. Time seems to be one big thing. There's going to be a major shift in how we use our time and how that time's spent with the kids - and even what the kids do with their own time.

The notion that learning time varies from student to student was common to participants. Referring to the outcomes orientation of the Common Curriculum, Jane indicated that all teachers needed to understand that not every student would achieve the outcomes at the same time. She felt that:

> . . . some kids are going to reach the outcome after two months and some kids are going to reach that outcome, and do it just as well, but it's going to take them five months.

All participants viewed time as a key obstacle. Essentially, there was not enough of it. Great plans get set aside quickly. The Ministry of Education and Training wants changes in a short time. Participants felt that there was insufficient time to talk and plan collaboratively with other teachers and there was no time to plan a whole year's work. The mere mention of the word "time" was becoming harassment.

Table 1: Obstacles

	Physical Obstacles	Content Coverage	Attitudes to Staff	Uncertainty and Stress	Time
Norma	Schools physically separate	High Schools expect coverage	Should read policies; don't discuss them	On hold until ministry decides	More time is needed
Jane	Grade 12 choices cut to assist grade 9	Arts often short-changed	Afraid of change; old mind-set	Teachers waiting to see if it will really work	No time to plan or discuss
Michael	Lack of computers and video equipment	Nightmare to cover all the basics	Retraining needed; they complain in private	Bureaucrats won't go to performance based	Big thing is time to plan
David	Science needs specific labs; timetable not flexible	110 hours must be filled	collective agreement limits flexibility	always more pressure; always beginning again	It's the pace; the ministry is rushing
Sally	Report cards out of date; portable classrooms	Will take years to integrate content	Other teachers annoyed dislike change	More stress than ever; where are we headed?	150 minutes per week is not enough prep time
Cynthia	No science lab; lack resources, we need content packages	Do we throw out all content? Can we pick and choose?	Staff development not great. we need work on strategy	Need to discuss impact of changes	4 o'clock is the wrong time to plan

Facilitators

The second major theme - facilitators - identifies several factors which assisted these teachers in adopting and promoting the ministry's mandated change. The first of these factors is embodied in that part of the policy promoting integrated learning, while the rest concern relationships and attitudes.

Subjects vs Program Areas

> To encourage integrated learning, subject matter and outcomes are organized into broad program areas that include all the traditional subjects. Outcomes are designed both to emphasize the relationships among subjects and to focus on the knowledge, skills, and values related to particular subjects. Students thus have opportunities both for integrated and for subject-specific learning.
>
> (Ministry of Education and Training, 1995, pp. 10-11)

Participants saw integration of learning as a necessary and valuable feature of the Common Curriculum. It gave these teachers of adolescents additional fuel to argue for teaching the student not the subject. Caught between elementary school with its learning centres and student-centred curriculum and the high school with its academic/subject/disciplines orientation - more like a university than a day school - teachers of this age group are often in an uncomfortable dilemma. Should we be nice? Should we be tough? The ministry's approach clearly gave room and substance to those teachers who had been arguing for a student-centred curriculum. Participants liked this change.

They acknowledged that high school teachers have traditionally regarded subject teaching as a 'sacred norm'. Consequently, a number of junior high school teachers supported subject orientation - if only to better prepare students for the work of secondary school. Now, broader-based goals, inspired by the 'learning outcomes' concept, could be implemented. The teachers in the arts

especially heralded the change. As a whole, the Arts program area had gained 'validity'; it was no longer 'shoved in the background.'

Despite their support of subject integration, two participants suggested that parents would not be as supportive. David felt that the public would view the Common Curriculum as the 'same old stuff'. Sally feared that it would be viewed as 'gobbledygook', but the effort of winning support would be worth it:

> I think students need to see the relevance of what they are taught and they need to connect the subjects together. I don't think the old program in secondary schools did that. It was too subject oriented.

Overall, this change to four quadrants or program areas from subjects is a change which participants welcomed in at least two senses. Firstly, it was seen as a way of making education more meaningful to students; and secondly, it is a useful political statement which these teachers saw as valuable in moving the curriculum in directions they had supported for several years. The quadrant weapon could be deployed in debates with colleagues and members of the public. To them it represented, finally, solid support in their efforts to focus on general areas of learning less devoted to the content of traditional subjects.

Leadership and Support

Generally, participants were positive about the support they had received from school administrators and board office consultants. It seems reasonable that those responsible for implementation of ministry mandated change would be supportive of those teachers who were working to promote such change. Principals did more than the minimum, however. They were described as 'understanding', 'very supportive', and 'great', while board office consultants seemed to be readily available and constantly helpful.

There was one exception noted by David. He had been invited to make a presentation at a district meeting of vice-principals and learned, to his chagrin, that they ". . .weren't even sold on the idea of the Common Curriculum". Perhaps the vice-principals felt that they had less of a stake in the successful implementation than did the principals. Perhaps they were more in tune with those teachers, unlike our participants, who were sceptical of yet another reform. Mark pointed out that this was the only case where he felt that administrators were less than enthusiastic about the Common Curriculum/ Transition Years policies. This annoyed him, but it did not interfere with his work in any substantial way. No other participants even identified vice-principals as being less than supportive.

Team Teaching

Participants were enthusiastic about the benefits of team teaching and team planning. They were quick to point out, however, that personalities mattered. Michael had been working closely with a teaching partner for several years. He was concerned that a new partner might not be as agreeable as his present one. Perhaps he would be 'isolated' like many other grade 7, 8 and 9 teachers. Jane felt that ". . .this is where the biggest work needs to be done."

Once again, we see that the mandated change suits our participants. The Common Curriculum/Transition Years policies require that teachers work together across school and grade boundaries. This was not viewed as an obstacle, but an opportunity for these change-oriented teachers. Cynthia has always team-taught. Sally insists that team teaching simply 'works'. All participants are committed to improving and enhancing team teaching potentialities.

Control of Change

Even though the Common Curriculum/Transition Years initiatives are mandated by the Ministry of Education and Training, participants did not feel as though they were powerless. They welcomed the direction of the change. While uncertainty about the next policy was somewhat of a concern, participants felt as though they were a positive part of the change. In this sense Sally spoke for all participants:

> I feel I've had pretty much,free reign. I think most principals and vice-principals are happy if there is a couple of teachers that are spearheading it and showing some initiative. I figure I'm going to be a part of the change anyway. I may as well be at the leading edge of it, so to speak.

Attitude to Change

While their colleagues worried about changes and the uncertainty associated with change, participants in this study were accustomed to change. They felt differently, as far as they were concerned, from the majority of their colleagues. In this regard their colleagues were worried about 'charging forward blindly' in making detailed plans based on the reforms. Participants' colleagues did not want to do too much preparation because policies could be altered as governments changed or interest groups gained attention from policy makers at the ministry. These experienced teachers saw change as a natural, necessary rhythm in their professional lives; it was an intrinsic part of teaching. Generally, they did not fear the work involved. They liked change.

Table 2: Facilitators

	Subjects vs Program Areas	Leadership and Support	Team Teaching	Control of Change	Attitude to Change
Norma	French teachers focus on development	Board office staff supportive	I team taught to learn technology	I can be a power of one; I can make it work	I like change
Jane	Common Curriculum validates the arts	New principal very supportive	We team teach for projects	You adapt. You work with it.	Transition Years is easy; positive change
Michael	4 areas makes sense but you need separate math	Former principal a most dynamic leader	Great with the right partner	If I don't like a change, I just don't do it	Let's not charge forward blindly
David	Common Curriculum is just a different package	Best support from colleagues in other schools	I loved going to other staffs	You alter the system to meet the kids needs	There's always change
Sally	Old program too subject oriented	Great support from principal, board staff	Partner has to be on same wave length	I've had pretty much a free hand	I like change; no progress without change
Cynthia	Arts were in back-ground before	Leadership has come from curriculum officers	Always team taught, I'm a team player	Not a lot of control, but some	I'm really excited about new standards

Beliefs and Practices

Certain data emerged which helped us to understand the educational posture of participants. These data do not necessarily reflect obstacles or facilitators of change but they help us appreciate the differences between these teachers and their colleagues - at least from their point of view. Of course the specific selection process involved seeking out those who were curriculum leaders and experienced, competent teachers. They are a select group who have the respect of board office curriculum coordinators. Data reveal that they also have the support of their administrative colleagues. The following gives some indication of the reasons that these teachers are supported by principals and board office personnel.

Attitudes about Students

Participants were consistently positive in their comments about students. Helping students to have a positive, optimistic, and determined outlook about schoolwork was also common. ". . .As long as it's your best", - or similar statements - are scattered throughout the comments of all participants. These teachers place a great deal of emphasis on student attitude and effort. Mark's comment is typical:

> What I stress to them is that they need to have a positive attitude. . . I mean it sounds kind of corny and stuff, to give it your best shot. But that's really what the underlying message is.

The other factor which is significant about this issue is that students are challenged. Teachers in this study are quick to explain that students must be productive and show consistent productivity. 'They are accountable'. Teachers, through monitoring and using various assessment procedures, develop a sense of student 'attitude'. Sally is quite definite:

> . . . that's how I look at their effort and attitude. I tell them that is what I'm doing. I check homework. And if they don't have it done, that, to me, is bad attitude.

Nowhere in the study do participants show any interest in student intelligence or academic ability. These teachers place much more emphasis on the elusive notion of attitude.

Attitude toward Parents

Parent involvement in education has changed dramatically in recent decades. Clearly, the new wave of parent empowerment has arrived. It is no longer a question of BBQs and fund raising activities. Many parents want to be involved in leadership and curriculum issues, and the teachers in this study said that they supported that involvement, not wholeheartedly, but solidly enough. They felt that parents are "really interested". Norma also felt that she needs the connection with parents, ". . .to learn the best I can about that student". Cynthia echoes with, "we have to be much more client oriented concerning parents".

Participants explained that parents often wanted the schools to 'stiffen standards'. Michael told of a case where a parent tried to have her child repeat a grade even though he and her other teachers did not see that was necessary. Sally recalled getting telephone calls from parents who wanted her to arrange her classroom in rows. Participants were generally supportive of parent involvement but they were cautious. Notwithstanding - or perhaps because of - 'teacher bashing in the media', Cynthia argued that early, honest and complete reporting to parents was very important.

David described the ambivalence his colleagues feel and his own direct method of demonstrating accountability:

> I think parents are our greatest allies, but there are a lot of people who don't see it that way. They think that the parents are going to second guess what we do and make decisions where maybe they shouldn't. But I don't see it that way. . . What we do at the end of every day as a routine is get them to answer the question 'What did you learn today?' before I dismiss them. So when they go home

they don't give the standard, 'Ah, nothing'.

Teaching Strategies

The classrooms of these teacher would probably be colourful and show variety, variety in grouping strategies, variety in instructional technique, variety even in the arrangements of desks. Cynthia thinks that ". . .sometimes it's much more fun to be a facilitator". Jane thinks that the key to good teaching is variety. None of the participants showed any enthusiasm for traditional lecture methods preferring 'a lot of small group work', 'cooperative learning', 'learning in pairs.'

Michael explains:

> There's lots of possibilities out there and I have a pretty fertile mind when it comes to those kinds of things. I tend to go off on tangents and we do that as a class too. Our emphasis now is more on day-to-day and we're making more of a change though we're not there yet. We're more aware of process as opposed to product.

Sally uses a process of moving from a traditional transmission approach at the beginning of the school year to a transactional approach (Miller, 1983) by the end of the year:

> I will start off the year with a teacher-directed structured program. . .then I change to cooperative group learning and peer mentoring. I try to make myself less and less. Then a lot of the kids have independent study. Near the end of the year I like to spend a lot of time getting the kids to teach the lesson. I mean I'm there, but more of a facilitator.

Variety, fun, interest, relevance, these are the kinds of terms which mattered to these participants. Mixing styles of learning, varying styles of teaching, mixing types of groups,

and changing grouping strategies are part of their regular routine of change. In short, they care about their work and want students actively engaged.

Outcomes vs Objectives

A key feature of the Common Curriculum is the emphasis on what a student can learn rather than what a student is taught. A teacher's having 'covered' the curriculum material is no longer sufficient. A teacher using set approaches to 'teach a class' is no longer sufficient.

> Outcomes-based learning is founded on the belief that all students can learn and achieve certain results, and that the responsibility of schools is to enable them to do so. In outcomes-based learning, curriculum refers to the varied experience by means of which students achieve a set of defined outcomes. Students do not attain the outcomes through a set of prescribed learning experiences in one program or in one grade; they attain them through a wide range of experiences encountered over several grades.
>
> (Ministry of Education and Training, 1995, p.23)

Participants saw that a great deal of work needed to be done here. David argued that a focus on outcomes would mean that "the system would have to change". Jane viewed the outcomes as being more solidly connected to accountability than any previous formulation of educational objectives. Norma suggested that this approach will compel teachers to "... look at where we are supposed to be and then work backwards from there".

All participants acknowledged that other teachers are less than enthusiastic about the notion of outcomes while they themselves feel that the outcomes approach is necessary. Sally's position represents the group rather well:

> The outcomes are a way of looking at it philosophically. They describe what students should be able to do at certain levels. I think that's really good. I think parents want that.

Assessment and Evaluation

All participants used a broad variety of assessment strategies including: learning logs, self-evaluation checklists, interview responses, solos, quizzes, tests, seatwork, portfolios, lab reports, peer evaluation in group work, standardized tests, and projects".

For these participants evaluation is formative, a procedure designed to help students - not a way of labelling students. Assessment and evaluation are part of learning; they are not the end of learning. The notion of passing or failing was not mentioned by any of these teachers. It was more an issue of determining strengths and weaknesses of students and providing feedback about progress towards achieving the learning outcomes. There was no support for end-of-term examinations. In fact, Cynthia was annoyed with the idea that her grade 8's have to face such examinations in grade 9:

> I'm frustrated with the exams ... I see my students leaving Grade 8 and they get into high school and all of a sudden they are faced with these exams. . . . I find my grade 8's get to a point where they are totally in a frenzy [when] they hear about exam week.

The teachers support the idea of delivering constant feedback, communicating with parents about homework, and supporting students efforts with encouraging responses. David's "Kids all make it in my class if they show up", is the kind of comment that often makes administrators wince and cringe, but it does show that he uses evaluation as a positive motivator. It also shows that he is focused on students feeling successful.

Table 3: Beliefs and Practices

	Attitude about Students	Attitude toward Parents	Teaching Strategies	Outcomes vs Objectives	Assessment and Evaluation
Norma	Don't need marks as a motivator	Need to accommodate parent work schedule	Lots of Cooperative learning	Teachers still finishing the chapters	One area I need to work on
Jane	I go from where the student is	Parents want kids to be more challenged	Small groups; peer tutoring	Many have criticisms about outcomes	Kids are evaluated against themselves
Michael	I stress positive attitude	Need more parent involvement	I don't exactly follow curriculum	Got to change our planning	Weekly homework reports
David	I don't give attitude marks	Parents want marks	Everyone gets a chance to be teacher	System will have to change for outcomes	Kids all make it in my class, if they show up
Sally	I think kids are amazing	Parents like the old A, B & C	I start with lectures & end with independent study	Outcomes are really good	We need a new report card
Cynthia	They are young adults	Public has a poor image of education	More fun to be a facilitator	Outcomes not that different	I assess on process

Discussion and Conclusions

There is evidence to suggest that the six participants in this study were a select group of teachers who were comfortable in the vanguard of change. They regarded themselves as different from many of their colleagues who were less interested in following the ministry's Common Curriculum/ Transition years reforms. They liked change; it seems that they have always liked change. They have grown accustomed to working with board personnel and principals and committed staff members. The participants were selected by board office personnel because of the leadership that they demonstrated and the interest they had shown over the years in committee work at a number of levels. Clearly, there were several occasions in the interview process when participants referred to other teachers as being less than supportive of the initiatives. Were there a significant number of colleagues who did not support the initiatives? It seems as though there were; but, of course, the data collection procedures did not address that issue.

Notwithstanding the leadership role participants had played in committee work, the substance of the questions did not really address much other than participants' classroom work. Yet in this area we see that attitude, which they regard as critical in students, is also critical in their work. Their attitudes are positive and optimistic. They make use of the mandated changes. It is almost as though they take ownership of the changes and are bound and determined to make the best of them. There is a remarkable absence of complaining. There is a marked tendency to see themselves as having more power to effect change than is substantiated by the procedures which were employed to construct the policies.

Reflections: Promoting Conversations

As a way of highlighting some of the issues that have resulted from this study we have chosen to share some of the dialogue that has occurred since completing the research. For simplicity we list here several rhetorical questions and comments that capture some of the tensions, concerns or dilemmas that emerged during our own conversations.

1. *Why do some teachers situate themselves at the leading edge of this type of change*? Are they individuals who lead our thinking and cause change? Or, are they "super followers" who make politically expedient forecasts and realize that it's better to simply get on with it?

2. *What is the change process here*? Are the teachers learning new strategies and internalizing new concepts? Or, are they simply adjusting their language to the new political milieu? What do they say when the tape is not running?

3. *How can teachers meaningfully respond to mandated curriculum changes that simultaneously promote constructivist pedagogy on the one hand and accountability demands through outcomes-based reform and measurement on the other hand*? Can we expect any coherent change processes in a political climate which demands imaginative, collaborative, transformative learning while simultaneously claiming unassailable, accountable, transmission learning? The very nature of these two different sets of mandated changes seems to promote confusion and uncertainty.

4. *How does the mandated change impact curriculum style*? Curriculum style usually refers to the "content", "process" of learning, and the "context" of learning. Given the schizophrenic nature of the Common Curriculum and the controversy surrounding the Transition Years, particularly destreaming, what is the appropriate emphasis that should be given to different curriculum styles?

5. *What is the most appropriate connection between assessment and evaluation and instruction*? While there is general openness to using a variety of assessment strategies; making the seamless link with instruction is not always an easy transition. In addition, there is a sense of mystery about how judgements of student achievement are made.

6. *Will curriculum integration ever be more than a "skin deep" change*? In the main, these teachers support the changes related to curriculum integration, but they speak the language of the traditional core disciplines of the latter 20th century. Is true integration a viable and realistic goal for all teachers?

7. *What made these particular teachers suitable for inclusion in this study*? Was it their record of curriculum leadership? their general dedication to student learning - in any context? their visibility in system work? their co-operativeness? their compliance? Given that the intent in this research was to find teachers who were involved in a serious, sustained and committed way with these curriculum reform initiatives, why were these particular teachers selected? While this may seem like a curious question to ask at this point, we

believe it has fundamental implications for the methodology of future, similar studies.

8. *Was the sample so specific that the findings are too limited*? Should the researchers have sought participants more openly, or more randomly so as to enhance the study's trustworthiness? What are the implications for similar future studies ?

9. *What is the relationship between the major themes that emerged in this study, that is, obstacles, facilitators, and beliefs and practices*? For example, subject integration and time can be both obstacles and facilitators. How are the dispositions of teachers toward educational change influenced by their beliefs and practices?

10. *Why are these teachers not working more collaboratively with others*? Are the teachers accepting only those changes that suit them and that they can handle by themselves? While there is evidence to support team teaching and co-operation with others, collaboration (in planning, staff development, organizing) was notable by its absence. Managing change seemed to be a personal responsibility.

In this study we set out to discover how six particular teachers coped with Common Curriculum/Transition Years mandated reforms. And, we certainly did that. But, it is also possible that we have discovered some useful information about what kinds of characteristics equip other teachers to deal with curriculum reform - especially when these policies and changes are set from afar and the various 'publics' look at education with a jaundiced eye.

REFERENCES

Hargreaves, A. and Earl, L. (1995). **Beyond Transition**. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Transfer Grant Proposal. Toronto, Ontario.

Kvale, S. (1996). **Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing**. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, S. (1985). **Naturalistic Inquiry**. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Miller, J. (1983). **The Educational Spectrum: Orientations to Curriculum**. New York: Longan.

Ministry of Education and Training. (1992). **Transition Years, Grades 7, 8 and 9**. Toronto, Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Ministry of Education and Training. (1995). **The Common Curriculum: Policies and Outcomes, Grades 1-9**. Toronto, Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Patton, M. (1980). **Qualitative Evaluation Methods**. Beverly Hills: Sage.

clay\aera\clayjohn.pap\03-17-97